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**LEN MENEGHELLO OF ILWU LOCAL 500, PCPA**

**INTERVIEWEE:** LEN MENEGHELLO

**INTERVIEWERS:** HARVEY SCHWARTZ

**SUBJECTS:** LOGGING; MINES; M&M; INTERNATIONAL UNION OF MINE, MILL AND SMELTER WORKERS; MACHINE OPERATING

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY SCHWARTZ:** Can you give me your name and date and birth and what local you're from?

[00:00:24] **LEN MENEGHELLO:** Len Meneghello, born April 10, 1935 in Stewart, British Columbia, Canada.

[00:00:36] **HARVEY:** Can you give us a little bit about your background, your early life?

[00:00:41] **LEN:** My early life, up north, I don't remember, but my mother left my dad because he put my older brother in Woodlands School which is—he was mentally retarded. That was down in the Vancouver B.C. area. So she said to my dad, "We have to move to Vancouver now, they've taken my son away." He wouldn't go, so she took my sister and myself and left my older brother with my dad and came down to Vancouver.

Because she couldn't help me with my homework, I wasn't too good in school and I was kind of getting a little bit picked on for being Italian because it was war time. And then I wasn't going to school. So at fifteen years old, I quit school, she sent me up to my father on the Alaska border. He said, "You want to go to school or do you want to go to work?" I said "I want to go to work."

Believe me, I am blessed by going to work. I'm not a scholar, but I have a rich imagination and I can think. Through my work experience, I can fix anything—I don't care what it is. I repaired my own automatic transmission.

So anyway, from there I went to—rebuild the tram head, dad and I—let me go back a little bit. We took an angle station down, an old angle station from a tramline, from a nineteen mile long tramline that had oar buckets on it that they hadn't been using for years. We took the timbers out of that and then we went up to the mine and we built a tram head, all by hand. So what we had was three by eight braces and ten by ten timbers, and so that was a full 16 inches, and I had to drill them by hand for the bolts to go through. So heave, sprain both elbows and both arms doing that.

Then after we'd finished that, he took me to the bull gang foreman, whose name was Felix, up in the marriage quarters. He just walked in the door, just, knock, knock, opened the door, and he said, "Felix, put the kid to work." He put a bottle of scotch on the table. Felix said, "John, sit down and have a drink." His wife put a couple of glasses on the table. They finished half the bottle and Felix took me down to the bunk house, went to the bull cook and he said, "Get the kid a bed."

So then I started out in the bull gang [laborers] , and bringing powder down from the powder house. And when the snow started to fly—and believe me it can fly up there. It could snow four feet overnight at sea level. Anyway, I was shoveling snow off the roof of the camp. They were developing a mine called [?Indian Mine?] , and that's why they were building a tram head and the tramline. They needed somebody to pack groceries up there. So he picked me and another guy by the name of Harry Swan. Harry Swan was, I think somewhere around 40, 35, or 40—I thought he was really old and I had thought 'I would out walk this old guy.' Oh no, no, no.

But anyway, we had the snowshoes on and we walked up there. And one day—now this is not bullshit—we used to stop, about halfway, and take our packs off in an old trapper's cabin or prospector's cabin that the roof had caved in, and we'd have our tea. One day he said, "Wolverine." I said, "What?" He said, "Come on, it's going to snow!" I says, "What?" He says, "Wolverine!" He says, "Wolverines run before and after a storm." And he's gone. I'm trying to put on my snowshoes because I used to take them off, he used to just loosen his pack. And he's gone and then he stops and he says, "Come on!" And we started out. Well, I'm telling you, it's not bullshit, it started to snow. And the snowflakes were like that, and like that. When we're going—and the last bit

to the mine, the Indian Mine, was like this. And I'm digging in with my hands, and of course I had mitts, leather mitts with wool mitts inside—they didn't have rubber in them days. And I'm pulling up and I'm shaking the snow off of my snowshoes. And then I guess we're about halfway up, and I'm, [gasping]—like that. And the pack comes off my back—I thought I was floating in air. The miners had come out, and they had lanterns, right, to show use the last part of the way. It was like a whiteout. So we got up there, and then after that, I quit the mine.

[00:06:55] **HARVEY:** What kind of mine was it?

[00:06:56] **LEN:** It was hard rock mine, it was a gold mine, but it was mostly lead and zinc and a little bit of silver. But they high-graded the gold. It was very interesting, I don't know if you've even been to a mill where they mill ore, but the first part of course is getting it into a railcar and then they put it in a jaw crusher. This jaw crusher goes like this, and it breaks it down to stones that are about like that [demonstrates with hands], and then it goes into a ball crusher, and this ball crusher moves like this [moves arms], and it breaks down into stones about like that [holds up fingers]. Then they put it into what they call a ball mill, and this is like a big cement truck, the same idea, but it's got steel balls about this big [demonstrates with hands] in it and steel balls about that big [holds up fingers] in it. That goes around and they put the chemical in the water and all of that in there. And that makes it down to sand, kind of like. Then it goes into a thing called flotation, and you can see this stuff comes out, it's all bubbles like this [waves fingers] and that's where the ore is. It sits on top of these bubbles and then they got little windmill kind of things like this that goes around and shoots it off right into a trough, kind of like. Then the water takes it down, and then that's the concentrate. Then the concentrate goes on a big dryer, this thing is about 10 feet through and about 10 feet high and about 10 feet wide. And as the ore sticks to it, it sucks the water out of it and then a blade takes the ore off and it falls into a pit. And then they put it in trucks and take it to the smelter. That's—[shrugs]

By that time I was a—they made me plumber's helper, by a guy named Andy Smith. He taught me a little bit of plumbing that was beautiful. Anyway, the only way we could make any money because we're five-days a week is we had to cheat a little bit. So we had, any time you got called out after dinner it was a four-hour guarantee. So he would go and take a pipe wrench, and get up on top of the mill somewhere and crack a union [pipefitting], and at like about ten or eleven o'clock at night, the shift boss in the mill would spot this water coming down. And we would—he would called me in my room, and we'd go up there and tighten it up and sit there for a half an hour, an hour, and we'd get four hours. So that was that part.

[00:10:02] **HARVEY:** What year is this?

[00:10:04] **LEN:** That was 1950. That was 1950. Then I quit the mine, and I went down to Vancouver.

I come down to Vancouver, and visited my mother and met an old friend of mine who I had went to school with who became a sailor. He was a couple years older than me—well no, not quite, maybe about a year-and-a-half—and he said, "Come on, Len," he says, "We need a deck hand."

So, I went to work as a deckhand on a small freighter going up and down the B.C. coast. I made four trips, just one month, because it was three days up and three days back, and one day to load in town. And I didn't really like it too much, but anyway, so the ship went into Stewart, and at that time they started logging.

A logging outfit came up from Oregon, called Western Woods. And they needed boom men. "Well, come on." I said, "I'm not a boom man." But they didn't have any caulks—you know what caulks are? They're the spiked shoes. Spiked boots that walk on logs. They didn't have any, so I wore my boots, my ordinary boots. And they'd dump the logs, and because there's a 24-foot rise and fall of tide there, half of the time they're dumping the logs dry with no water. So the logs would get all twisted like this, and then when they floated, I'd have a peavey [lumberman's hook], and I'd—they were called jackpots—and I would untangle them. But when you get down to the last two logs, and you take that last log off, they both spin and I'd fall in the water, right? So then the rest of the boom men used to stop—they were older guys—they used to stop and watch me roll the last log off so they could laugh. And they would laugh. And then when it was low tide, I would go around, and I would pick up all of the peavies—they were usually four or five. I used to fall in about four or five times a day. Then my caulk boots came, and then I'd started regular boom work, and became pretty good at it.

Then they put it out to contract. So then I went to work in the bush as a chokerman [attaching choker wires on logs], and that's where I learned my first splicing, called a logger splice. And what they call a short long splice. A short long splice with a five-eighths wire is about six or seven feet long, but a regular long splice is about 40 feet or 50 feet long. But anyway, there's a shortcut and I learned that. I learned my splicing there.

[00:13:21] **HARVEY:** Are these union jobs? Any of these jobs?

[00:13:23] **LEN:** No, none of them were union jobs. The IWA, the [International] Woodworkers of America were, they were only on Vancouver Island, they weren't to Prince Rupert [, B.C.] or Queen Charlotte's [Haida Gwaii, formerly Queen Charlotte Islands] yet, no. But I was, when I joined the Mine, Mill, [and Smelter Workers] —

Actually I forgot a story, why this guy [?Spike?] became famous. We went on strike, and the cooks locked the cookhouse, they wouldn't feed us. So he booted the door down, booted the cooks down the road, and said, "Can anybody cook?" And the strike was over as far as that—that was it. So we were on strike for about a week and then it was over. And they signed with the Mine, Mill and Smelter's Union [International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers] and that's the first union that I belonged to. When I was logging, I didn't log all that much, a couple of years, but enough to learn a little bit.

Then I came to town—oh no, I got a broken arm, that's when I broke my arm here, right, you can see it's [gestures along his arm]—crooked. And I—

[00:14:44] **HARVEY:** How'd that happen?

[00:14:46] **LEN:** Well, what we were doing is we're building a raft to take two D7 Cats [bulldozer], Caterpillar cats, down the canal to another logging camp. What that is, is they put logs about this big [holds arms out], about 30, 35 feet long—I shouldn't say 35 feet because everything is even number with logs, right? It's either

30, 32, 34, 36, okay. They're like that, and they put them together like that [holds fingers together] and they put one log across each end like that [lays a finger perpendicular to other hand]. They take the cable, and they choke the log here that goes like that, and they go out under that one, up there, over the log, down like that under that one, over the log, and they weave it like that. [demonstrating with fingers] And then you tighten it. Well, they had a chain that'd they grab the cable with and they put the hull back from the donkey, or the winch, on that. But the snatch block that it went through because the donkey was here and the line come out here and went that way. And I was pulling slack because the snatch block was seized.

In them days, we didn't have the safety that we have today. Anyway, the chain broke, the weld in the chain broke, and that hook, the little hook come back, and I could see it coming but I just moved like this [shifts to the side], and hit that like that [smacks forearm] and it broke both bones. And then so I grabbed my arm like this [holds arm] and I went to town—they gave me a ride to town on a logging truck. And the nurse said, "Can you hold your arm out like this and wiggle your fingers?" And I said, "Yeah," I guess and I try it and I'm like this. And she says, "Oh, your arm isn't broken, it's only badly sprained and bruised." So she wrapped it up, gave me some pills, I think they were—oh, what were they? Oh, I forget what they were. Anyway, I was living in a shack, and I'm all night like this [holding arm]. And then 8 o'clock in the morning I was in so much pain. I walked up there. So she gives me an X-ray—she wouldn't give me an X-ray the day before. Then she danced out of the X-ray room and she says, "Oh your arm is broken." And then they chartered a plane and took me to Prince Rupert [, British Columbia] . It's about 120 air miles to Prince Rupert.

Then, that's when I ended up in Vancouver again. After my arm was healed, this friend that was the sailor, his grandfather was a man by the name of Al Blakely. And he said he was the foreman on the levy of a hydraulic dredge. This hydraulic dredge is a dredge with a big cutter on the end and a big pump, and it sucks the water in the sand up through a pipeline—this was an 18-inch pipeline, no, 24-inch pipeline, I'm sorry. The dredge was called The Mackenzie, the 18 pipeline was on The Indian. Anyway, he said, "Come on, we're going to work." I [said] , "Okay."

So I went to work with him on the levy for a little while, a couple of weeks and then they needed a deckhand. And because I was good on my feet from working the boom, I was kind of a natural, okay—walking the pipeline and repairing the pipeline and everything we had to do, adding pipe, taking pipe out, okay.

So after, I don't know, 3, 4 years, something like that, with a few jobs—I won't describe all of the jobs we went on, but we had a job in Kitimat [, British Columbia] , that's about 30-miles south of—okay, maybe you wouldn't know, say, 120 miles from Prince Rupert, on the coast. And we drove up there and the dredge sank on the way to Kitimat, just on the bottom end of the Queen Charlotte Islands, Queen Charlotte Sound, just off the edge of Egg Island. So anyway, I'm sitting at home, and Al phones me.

He says, "Come on, Len, we're going to work," because I used to drive him to work, because he was a pensioner that day but he was still working. I think he must have been close to 70 then. And he says, "Come on, we're going to work." I used to drive him because he couldn't drive. So we come down to the waterfront and he walks right into the dispatch of the coastwise. And that's something you just don't do, I mean in them days, the dispatchers were God. And it was like Old Home Week [reunion] , "Oh, hi Al!" "Oh, hi John!" You know, yeah?

And so he put me in front of the wicket, and it was room just about this size, right? And it was packed—there must have been, I don't know, oh 20 or 30 guys in there. And he put me in front. And the wicket open, and the bright light come out and he says, "Who is he? Who is he? That guy? Yeah, that guy there. Yeah. Okay," and the wicket closed. And we're almost the first casuals dispatched. So we got to work on coastwise, down on the Northland Navigation. And coming—

[00:20:41] **HARVEY:** Is this a union? A union situation?

[00:20:42] **LEN:** Yes, it was a union situation.

[00:20:44] **HARVEY:** What union?

[00:20:45] **LEN:** Longshoremen.

[00:20:46] **HARVEY:** Oh, so this is the longshoremen?

[00:20:47] **LEN:** This is longshoremen, this is in. . . This is in June of '62.

[00:20:52] **HARVEY:** Do you know what local it was?

[00:20:55] **LEN:** Oh, god. No. We amalgamated in '65, uh, okay—ah, god—

[00:21:04] **HARVEY:** One of those locals—

[00:21:05] **LEN:** One of the locals. Yes, it was the coast of—

[00:21:07] **HARVEY:** It became Local 500? Later on?

[00:21:08] **LEN:** It became 500, yup, okay. And Johnny Johnson, he was the head dispatcher and the president of the coastwise and nobody messed with him, he was mean mother. Anyway, coming home that night in the car, driving him home, he says, "Len, I got a replacement, but you stay here, you're set." So he was the one that got me on the waterfront. I tried to get more work coastwise, but they only work three days a week. So on the days—that was Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, So Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, I went down to 501, which is the deep sea hall, and I was fortunate enough that one day, about quarter to nine, they ask for a boom man. And they said, "Can anybody—is anybody a boom man?" And I looked around and nobody said anything, so I put my hand up, I said, "Yeah, I'm a boom man." And I went to the wicket and he said, "Are you sure?" And like, "Yeah, I'm a boom man. I worked on the coast." And so he gave me a dispatch slip.

So we go down to Shed 7, which is CPR [Canada Pacific Railway] down closer to Stanley Park [Vancouver] anyway. And I walk aboard ship, and said, "Who's the ram-rod here?" And there was this head foreman by the name of Jimmy Nicholls, who was a real idiot, and he snatched the dispatch slip out of my, and he said, "What do you mean this ram-rod shit?" He said, "Get down on the boom." And if I've had \$0.10 in my pocket, I

would've walked off. I hadn't intended on staying on the waterfront, I was going to go back to the dredge when they got a new dredge.

But anyway, I went out onto the boom, and we—in them days, we had small logs, we called them pecker poles, there's just little. And nobody could've walked on them but me, right, I was used to them. But I'm not used to—when you're working on a boom, you're working in water up to If you're not up to here [indicates on legs], up to your knees in water, you're not working. So I was supplying three and sometimes four hatches with logs. And then at noon, a couple of the guys Redd Baker and Smith—what the hell was that one? Not Howie Smith, his brother—and they said, "Are you coming to the bar?" I said, "No, I'm broke." They said, "Come on we'll put your money in." So they got a mickey on the way back, and around, just before coffee time, they got half-pissed, because had their five beer at lunch and then half a mickey, each. Right, you know what a mickey is? It's half a bottle of whiskey, okay? A full bottle is 26 ounces, and so it's a half, so it's 12 ounces in there.

So anyway, to shorten the boom, because when you take the logs out, there's more space and to shorten it, they have a couple of ropes come out from the ship, from the gunnel. And they tie it on to a boom chain and they put, well the logs, because there's no space, the boom sticks are 66-feet, and you can only collapse them so much, right? So they dropped the chain and they kick—and to pull, so like this, right? [demonstrates with fingers] So this, dropped the chain there, and the logs parted and they could pull it in. But what they didn't realize that the tide was running, and I said, "No, no, no!" And I ran over there and I kept four logs out and I fished the chain with my pipe pole, and I'm down on my knees and hand down the hole, and I grabbed the toggle and I pull it up and it's just right here." And my head foreman, Jimmy Nicholls says, "Grab those four [mimes saying expletive] logs." And I thought, 'Here's my chance.' I dropped the toggle, I danced out on to the boom stick and I grabbed the four logs like that and I said, "Where do you want them, ramrod?" And just then, the tide took off, took over, and the whole rest of the tier went down the harbor. He says, "I'm gonna have to get a tug to get them back." And I never said a word, I just, and he knew, he knew he's screwed up. Well you see, I was 27 years old. I wasn't a kid. And I hadn't intended on staying, but anyway.

So the next thing, I guess I made a couple of other boom jobs and some general jobs on the dock. Anyway, I'm on the ship this one time, and Scotty was a well-liked Scotsman, spoke with a real Scottish accent. We were taking out pineapple juice in tins, you know, they were in tin cans but in boxes, of course. And wouldn't you know it, there was gin in behind, so he says in his Scottish accent, "Somebody get up there and get in behind there and get a couple of jugs there." I'm the guy that's the green horn, so I'm forced to crawl up there, I get up there and find my way back. I get a couple of jugs in, and I come out and there's a mate there and it's a German ship. And I say, "Hey, I'm ready to come out." [whispers] Scotty says, "Wait a minute." And he goes over to the mate, and starts talking to him, "Ah," he says, "I was over in in Germany and I did this and I did that." And finally the mate says, "What did you do over?" And he says, "Ping-ping-ping." [mimes shooting] And the mate couldn't take his eye off of him, and I'd come climbing down, so that was, that was that story.

So then I was starting to my feel, and the next part was down below, and with teenagers, there was just of school: 17, 18, 19. And in them days, there was eight men down below for a discharge. And we were discharging Japanese cargo and of course it's all shored up with two-by-fours, two-by-sixes, four-by-fours, and

it had big spikes in it. You take all this stuff apart, and then you take your cargo out, and the foreman said, "Oh, just throw it aside." I said, "No. That's not safe." I said, "We'll make loads out of it, and we'll put in on deck." "No," he says. I said 'well, never mind,' and I started making loads, and the guys, the young guys they [mimes making loads]. He said, "You're fired." So I go up the top side, I said, "Hey, you got the business agent?" [They say] "Fuck off." Because they're pissed they're drinking. So I go down a couple more hatches, and I find the phone number and I phone the business agent, and a guy by the name of [?Bob Peeples?] come out.

[?Bob Peeples?] was a war hero. He was a bit of a drunk himself when he was in the Army, but he was in AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] then. And he was very, very well-respected. This guy was just solid. And he came aboard the ship, and he talked to me, and I told him what happened. He went to the foreman and said, "Hire that man back immediately." He went to the gang, and said, "Here's a guy," he says, "It's his first god damn week on a job doing your job." You know, it's just like that, and these guys are like this [shaking arms as though in fright], right? Everybody respected—Bob was a tough guy. So that was a bit of my history on the waterfront.

Then when I got known, a little more the next year there, they knew that I was a good, boom man, and so they said, "Be in the hall at quarter to nine in the morning, and we'll hire a spare boom man." So I got five days a week. I work steady when everybody else was sitting in the barn. And then because they knew I could splice—I know every splice in the book, I don't care what it is, whether it's logger splices, marine splices, short, long splices, Farmer's Eyes, Molly Hogan's—I don't care what it is. So then I would replace the guys in the locker when they went on holidays, and I would splice. So I really made the union in three years. Everybody else took almost at least four years, but I made it in three because I had my hours.

So then I got in the union, went to work in a gang—a guy name of, Herb, who was the hatch tender. He was a real idiot. He was so absent-minded, if we were on general cargo, he'd take the empty board back on the dock and the slingman would say, "Herb! Herb! You forgot the load again!" And "Oh, oh, oh." And the old steam winches, of course. And bring the board back in [waves hands]. Well, if his hands were on the handles, nobody went into the square. Everybody stood, "Herb, take your hands off the handle." And he said, "Okay." And then you'd go out and do whatever you needed to do. Because like, if you were on what we'd call gunnies, they called them cotton down here, they're big bales, and so what you would do is you'd put a rope sling around them, and pull them out. But they're stacked up in the wing, and you'd pull them out and they'd fall down and "boom, boom." And they sometimes come out of that sling. Well, if they come out of the sling, you wouldn't go out there. His hands were on the handle, and you go, "No, no." And we'd say, "Herb!" And you'd go out there, and sometimes the foreman would say, "Herb! For Christ sakes get your hands off the goddamn handles!" And so, that was that part. And then I went on the executive for one term.

[00:31:56] **HARVEY:** When was that?

[00:31:57] **LEN:** Oh, Jesus Christ, I can't remember.

[00:31:59] **HARVEY:** Approximate.



[00:32:01] **LEN:** Let's see, it would probably, maybe, I was in the union for maybe about 10 years, I guess—something like that?

[00:32:11] **HARVEY:** So it's around 1972?

[00:32:12] **LEN:** Something like that, yes.

[00:32:14] **HARVEY:** What'd you think of the union?

[00:32:17] **LEN:** I love unions. Look it—we create the middle-class. You cannot create economy on minimum wage. Like you know what TED Talk is, don't you? [Recorded conferences] Okay. I listened to a multi-millionaire, his name was Nick Hanauer. He was a New York stockbroker, and he said, "Companies don't create the economy," he says, "Working people with good wages create the economy. I can buy one car, not three thousand cars. I can buy one pair of jeans, not three thousand pairs of jeans." He says, "When there's no work, we lay them off. So we don't create the economy." He says, "Working people with money to spend create the economy."

Getting into a union and being a union organizer and at least helping in organizing union rights—I was 15-year-old—which is the Mine, Mill, and Smelters [union] —and I've got it in my blood. And my daughter has to. She works in the Parks Board in Vancouver, and she was on the executive [board] CUPE [Canadian Union of Public Employees] that's the government union. And I asked her when she first got on the executive, "How did you make out with the oath, the oath?" She says, "Dad, I took that oath when I was 6 years old." So yes. But anyway—

[00:34:02] **HARVEY:** So you were on the executive board?

[00:34:05] **LEN:** Yes, I was on the executive board. I was there for one term, and then they—it's just—pardon me—it's too bureaucratic. So I didn't run again—a lot of guys give me shit, but anyway, I didn't run again.

Then when my son was five years old, I wanted to get him into soccer, so, the only way, and I was working in the afternoon shift because they paid time-and-a-half—and the only way I could make time-and-a-half was to go bossing, so I could work days, and make night money, longshore night money. Right? Because bossing they made one-third more than longshoreman. So then I was here for 15 years. My son was only soccer for 10 years, and I was going to quit after 10 years, but I forgot. You get in a rut in bossing, it ain't that bad, I never really did like it, but anyway, I'm in there. One day I woke up and that's it, I quit. And the head of the 514, which is the foreman that's local, he said, "I could get you a job anywhere," and I says, "No, I've had it."

But before that, I was, I got run over with a big lift truck and I broke—22 brakes all together. 18 in the foot down here [indicates on foot], the ankle both sides, and here [indicates] both bones. So 18, 2, is 20, 22 breaks. And so I went and got two books. One on self-healing, and one on self-hypnotism.

After, about six-and-a-half months, I said to the compensation Bboard, the Workmen's Compensation board, "Make me a pair of boots, I'm going to work." So they hauled me into the doctor's office, the compensation

board, and he said, "You do realize how serious you are injured?" And I says, "I know how serious I'm injured." I threw my books on his desk and I said, "These are my bibles: self-healing and self-hypnotism. Now make me a pair of boots, I'm going to work."

I got ahold of my company, but I had to go to work on the dock. Before that, I was a ship foreman, but I couldn't climb ladders with this [injury] , but I wanted to go to work, but the head foreman on the dock, or the superintendent on the dock, him and I never got along very good because he was drinker when he was head foreman on the ships. So he said, "No." said, "Okay, that's fine with me."

I went to another company called Casco who had dock work. I said to the Compensation Board, "Look, I'm taking a week off, I'm not going to come in," because you had to go into the Compensation Board for rehabilitation every day. I said, "I'm going fishing," I said, "I've been working hard, I'm going fishing I'm taking a week off." And they said, "Well we're going to kick you off for compensation." And said, "I don't care, I need to rest." So I went up fishing, and my company phones me up, and they heard that I was going to go to work on the dock for Casco and they said, "Len, you're coming to work with us" And what the hell was—Andy Dean. And I says, "What about Andy Dean?" They said, "Never mind Andy Dean, you're going to work on the dock." And I said, "Thank you very much, but. . ." So then I get to work on the dock, and—

[00:38:12] **HARVEY:** What was the name of your company?

[00:38:13] **LEN:** Western Woods, Western Woods.

No! Pardon me, Western Stevedoring. Western Woods was the logging company up north. Western Stevedoring. So, I like, I love work, I really do. I'm a bit hyper and I love work. So if there was a block that was in the middle of the road, I would pick it up. If there was something to do, I did it.

I found lumber they had lost for two years because I said to the guy that were hauling it with the fork lifts to the ship, I said, "If you see a strange package of lumber, put it aside." So they would put it aside, because you know when you take a bin of lumber, it's usually all exactly the same, there's different lengths, but it's all the same make, it's all the same brand, and you could tell an odd package, so they would put it aside, and I would go get the clerk to the office, and say, "I found a package of lumber," And [he] would say, "Holy Christ, Len, we have, we've been looking for that for a couple of years. I did things like this.

So anyway, I didn't like unloading lumber trucks. I just didn't like it. So there was—I wasn't the only one. Anyway, they used to give their favorites, they'd say, "You know, you're on lumber trucks" "Ah, just give me a day off." And so they'd take a day off and then they'd come to work on a different job, so I clued into this, and then I said, "No, I don't want to, give me a day off." "Well, when you come back you'll have lumber trucks." "Well, then give me two days off." "Well, when you come back you'll have lumber trucks." I says, "Does it matter how many days off?" And they said, "No, you're having lumber trucks." And I said, "Okay, can I use your phone?" And "Yeah." I picked up a phone and I phoned the head office downtown and I said—and this time I'm pretty well-healed, I said, "Do you got a job on the ship?" And they were like, "Yeah, yeah." "Thanks,

I'll be coming on to work on the ships." I slam the phone and I said, "I quit, you want a week's notice, or am I gone now?" Then I went out and got in my pickup truck and I went to the job that I was doing on the dock.

So here comes Andy Dean, the guy that doesn't like me, and the head foreman, and they said, " Len, you don't have to quit." I said, "You're too late," I says, "You know me, my word's my bond." I says, "You give them other guys their job, your favorites," I says, "Okay, I'm gone." And then I went to work on the ships.

And then that's what happened when I got tired of boss—I worked out of the pool because—they have pool for when your company's not working, you can go to work for another company. Basically that's about it. And then I, when I retired, the guy that was the vice-president, he was sick with cancer, and so they asked in I would be vice-president. And so, and the reason the vice-president sits on the board and not the president is because the president of that day, at that time, was [?Van McClain?] and wouldn't travel. So the vice-president did the traveling.

[00:42:00] **HARVEY:** Len, is this for Local 500? Or for the Pensioners at this point? Because you'd said you had retired?

[00:42:10] **LEN:** I was retired, this is for the Pensioners, yes. I used to go to meetings, naturally, right. And then so that was that.

[00:42:13] **HARVEY:** What year and how old were you when you actually retired?

[00:42:19] **LEN:** 64.

[00:42:19] **HARVEY:** You were 64 years old?

[00:42:21] **LEN:** Yes, 35 years at 64.

[00:42:24] **HARVEY:** Okay—

[00:42:25] **LEN:** I had to put the full time in, okay? What happened was that I was going to retire a little earlier. So me and my wife went up in front of the company's pension guy, and they said, "Well, you know you're not going to get credited with your foreman's time for your pension." And I says, "What?" "No, you're going to have to take all the longshore pension." And I says, "Well, how come?" And they says, "Well, because the foreman never had a pension agreement at that time, it was in negotiations." Okay, so then they said, "You're not going to get the M&M, that's the Mechanization [Mechanization and Modernization Agreement] , you know about the M&M. Okay—

[00:43:17] **HARVEY:** Mechanization and Modernization—

[00:43:18] **LEN:** Yes. Because it's not reciprocal, it goes from 500 to 514 foreman, but it doesn't go from 514 back to 500 when you quit. So I said, "Well that's bullshit." So then I went to see Doug Sigerson [sic] , who is a good friend of mine, and he said, "What?" He got on and picks up the phone and he, he was really rough, I

mean. He picks it up and he talks about the M&M and [says] "Well, he's fucking getting it!" and he crashed the phone down. I know I shouldn't be swearing here but you can cut this out.

Anyway that took me into the union, put me another four years before I got my M&M. The reason I got it was because of a very popular guy by the name of Jim Pearce quit. And I told Jim, "You know you're not going to get the M&M." "What?" He says. Well everybody in 500 loved Jim, they didn't love me, but they loved Jim. So then 500 went after it, along with 514, and then I got it. I got \$25,000 and then about 3 or 4 years later, they gave me another \$8,000. So then, well, and then because I have a very good marriage and I'm blessed with the lady I have, you know, life is just easy.

[00:44:57] **HARVEY:** Maybe the, the M&M—I'm not sure what you mean by the M&M. I know it's mechanization—

[00:45:01] **LEN:** Mechanization and Mechanicalization [sic] Agreement. Okay what happened—

[00:45:06] **HARVEY:** It's not the American one from 1960, this is a little different.

[00:45:09] **LEN:** This is a little, well it's different. Okay what happened when they brought in containerization. They wanted to knock the gang sizes down. Right? So they knock the gang sizes down to six men, only two men below. So how do we, how do we get paid? That's when Harry Bridges came up and talked to the union and explained their M&M [in the U.S.] .

So we modeled ours after the ones down here. So what happened to our pension was we were, we said, "Look it, with containers, we want, if there's any, if there's more than two consignees to a can, we want to unload it on the dock." They said, "No." So I went to arbitration because we figured if there's two or more consignees in a can, they have to hire somebody anyway, so it might as well be us.

We went to arbitration, and he gave us so-much a can—it was 10 bucks or I don't know what the hell it was, but anyway we get from that, about 20 million dollars a year, and that goes into our pension fund—that's extra. That's beside what we put in per hour and what the company puts in per hour. That's just extra. And you know, we were pissed off when he did that, but we really thank him today, yes. Then like because of the bridge work and my splicing and my boom work, and my—every—all of the jobs I had prior to the waterfront, just helped me on the waterfront. I'd done it all before, so that's why, you know, I could argue with the foreman, because you know, I thought they knew less than I did. Anyway, I guess maybe just sticking my chest out a little bit there. Maybe I shouldn't. But anyhow—

[00:47:34] **HARVEY:** It's quite alright. There was some fund with the M&M, that is to say, when you retired you got a certain amount?

[00:47:40] **LEN:** Yeah, I got that, yeah. It's now \$75,000, they get paid \$75,000 when they retire now.

[00:47:48] **HARVEY:** Okay. So I get it, right, you retired at about 1999?

[00:47:52] **LEN:** Exactly '99. Yes. No, I'm blessed to be a union man and doubly blessed to be a longshoreman. Look it, the reason we're so strong is they can't move the ocean. Okay?

I'll give you another for instance, we had a golf club, and we used to go down to Portland here for tournaments. And they used to come up—well the guys from Portland [, Oregon] not so much, but Port Angeles [, Washington] , we went to Port Angeles and Port Angeles guys used to come to Victoria and Vancouver, you know. So the guy that was running it got pissed off and so they didn't have anybody to run it, so they asked me. And I says, "Yeah, okay."

So I went to one of the shipping companies, a big container company, and ask them for some donations. And the receptionist gave me six balls, and a couple of hats. And I looked at it and I said, "That's not adequate, thank you." You know, because Jimmy who used to raise money, he was a BA [business agent] , he used to get a hell of a lot better than that. And the guy that was running the golf tournament used to do better than that, but they didn't know me. Okay, so I wasn't known to them, I never worked for that company or anything. But at any rate, I said, "That's not adequate," and I pushed it back and then I went down. Before I left, I said to the receptionist I says, "I think you have a ship in, don't you?" And then I left.

Then I went down to the dock, and I talked to one operator, a lift truck operator. And I said, I told him the story. And I said, "Look it, if I get a hold of you, slow down, don't tell anybody else, we only need one guy to slow down and that slows down the whole ship, right?" Because whatever hatch he's in, that's got to sail with the rest of the hatches. And then I go back to the union home. And in about, I don't know, a half hour, an hour later, I get a phone call. "Len Meneghello there?" "Yeah." "Can I talk to him?" "Yeah." "Uh, would you please come down here?" she says. "We have some more prizes for you." "Oh, okay." So then I go down the dock, and I tell the guy, "They got some more prizes, just hang on, I'll be right back." She had a check for \$500. She had six dozen golf balls, she had a whole case of hats, she had five jackets, and she says, "Is there anything else we can do?" I said, "Well you can put a foursome in, so thank you very much." And I went back.

So that's how easy it is, right? If you know how to do it and you don't make noise about it, you just go do it, right? You just, that's kind of the way I operated. I always upped the production, because if the company doesn't make money, the longshoremen are not going to make money. We can't get a raise out of them if they don't make money. So you have to have production, and I love production. Like I told you, I'm a little bit hyper, and I love to work and I can fix anything.

When my wife got pregnant, she said, "We need a house." I said, "Okay." Well I went to work in Squamish [, British, Columbia] , which was working 12 hours a day, and then that was a long drive up, it was three-quarters of an hour drive up, and sometimes when the car we are, and the guys were drinking and I didn't drink, so I quit that. I started fixing up old houses. I'd buy a house in the early seventies for between \$25,000 and \$35,000. Put a kitchen and a bathroom in, paint them and sell them in one month because if you kept them longer than one month, the payments got you. So then I paid my own house off and when I finished that. So that's why I can do anything. I do plumbing, I do carpentry work, I don't care what it is. That's my story.

[00:52:53] **HARVEY:** Well that's great. How did you decide to become so involved with the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association over time? You've been quite active I gather.

[00:53:04] **LEN:** You know, one of my heroes down here is a guy by the name of David Lomas. Dave was past area president. He is past president of everything, secretary of everything, and he said, "What the hell are you doing, Len? Who are you doing that for?" And I says, "It's my turn." And that's the way I feel about it. Because I went bossing and couldn't do more for the union, and so when I retired I thought, "Okay, I have the time now, I got to do this."

And to tell you the truth, what Big Bob [ILWU President Robert McEllrath] is doing now? In getting ahold of foreign unions, foreign docks—like I was at two solidarity conferences, the first one in Long Beach [, California] , the second one in Sydney, Australia. He's a very smart man, you know? Because that's where we're going to get our help, there is no doubt about that.

And what the union here did for the Australians when the Columbus Canada [a container ship] came, you heard about that story, that's part of your history, and you know, the Australians just love that, and you guys got them back to work. The thing was the supreme court of Australia did tell the Howard government at that time you can't break a union contract. And he made them put the contract back. But the kicker was the Columbus Canada that made the Howard government put the guys back. Because they wouldn't, they wouldn't have put the contract back without the help of the longshoremen on the Pacific West Coast—what a move that was.

[00:55:07] **HARVEY:** That's great. Do you have any wrap-up or final statements looking back what it all meant to you? I mean you sort of, kind of covered that to some degree, but do you have any good, final statement that we, something that we've left out, something you've left out, what it all meant to you?

[00:55:22] **LEN:** Well, not really. Like I did all the shoring work after, once Western Stevedoring Company found out that you know, that I was a bridgeman. Like I did all the shoring work for when you had lumber on deck, and you had to—if there was—because you start the walls on the outside with lumber like that [gestures]. Bundles like [gestures], and there's always a hole like this or like this [gestures]. And you've got to brace that [gestures], right? You put—you got to cut wedges and do that. And to be perfectly honest with you, they didn't know the correct way to drive in a wedge. Now there's a right way, and a wrong way, and if you put it in the wrong way, the wedge will split, see and then it will pop up. So you got to put it in the right way. Then they found out this, and when we got heavy lifts, and you had to shore heavy lifts, I got the jobs. And so, that was basically—

They pulled me off a job one time and had a brand new pair of jeans on, and one of the bands ripped my brand new pair of jeans, first day, like that. So I went to that guy, the superintendent that got me off the job to go do the shoring work, I said, "You owe me a pair of pants." "Oh, you're kidding." And I says, "No, you owe me a pair of pants." "Okay." But he never come through, so I told him, I says, "I'm not going to do anymore shoring." So when a job come up and he'd come to up me and he was begging me, he says, "Len, you got to do it, nobody

else can do it." And I says, "You owe me a pair of pants." He gave me the money for the pants, right out of his pocket.

But anyway, yes. I'm very stubborn, and I'm very honest and I'm very loyal. And my word is my bond, that, my dad taught me that. He couldn't read or write, but the handshake, and especially when you go up north in those small towns—like Stewart was only about 350 people—you know, most of the old-timers—my dad was born in 1889, so you know, most of them couldn't read or write. They could add and subtract and do all of that kind of stuff because he was carpenter. But when you gave your handshake, that was it. That's the thing.

And I'm 100% union, I don't care what union it is, when I'm in it, if I'm in that local, then I back them 100%. I was picket captain, you know, when we went on strike there.

[00:58:28] **HARVEY:** When was that?

[00:58:28] **LEN:** I think it was '68, something like that, I'm not sure. Did Tom tell you, Tom Dufresne tell you, I showed him how to drive a lift truck?

[00:58:42] **HARVEY:** No, he didn't actually.

[00:58:47] **LEN:** Well he was a mechanic, and you know, if there wasn't any work in the shop, they'd come over, and because he could drive a lift truck empty and take it in and fix it and take it out of a garage and put it back, you know, was, "Oh yeah, I can drive a lift truck." But anyway, he was supplying me with lumber, and I took a look out from the ship and I said, "This guy needs a hand." So I just went out there and gave him a couple of tips, and you know, and that.

Basically, what I told him is you need your forks leveled, right? If you're split going in-between to take, lumbers come four at a time. So you take the top two off, and put them down that and then they take all four loads and packages it and put them on the ship. Well, because of this side shift and everything in front of you and the hydraulic cylinders, you can't really see the tips of your forks very good. So you don't even know if your forks are this way, or this way [gestures]. You don't know when it's level.

So there's a great big bar, goes around and holds the frame together. And I said, "Tom, get out here." And he says, "Okay." "Now take a look at that." Because you're looking at the side now. "You see that? It's level. Now look at your forks, your forks are level, so you can see this inside, so you know your forks are level and that's level." And basically, I really didn't teach him how to drive a lift truck, I just told him a couple of flying points, right, you know? But he'll tell you. Every time he sees me and there's somebody around him, "Oh yeah, Len taught me how to drive a lift truck." But you know, not really, a couple of points here and there. Otherwise, nah.

[01:00:43] **HARVEY:** That's great.

[01:00:45] **LEN:** Because you know in the bush, when I was in the bush, first we had cats, right? So we're logging with caterpillar tractors, okay? So then you ask the cat skinner, when it's slow, "Can I drive it?" So I got to drive cats, a little bit, not good at it, but that was else that I used for my benefit on the waterfront because

we're on bulk jobs. They said, "Can anybody drive a cat?" "Yeah, I can drive a cat." So you put the cat down below, it's a small cat, and on an oar job you just level it out. Because it just goes down on one big pile. So and, potash on the dock, when they're taking potash, you have to take a cat and push it into the hopper. "Okay, I can do that." So things like that, I feel like there isn't anything I can't do.

Oh another thing, driving crane. I drove crane in operating in [inaudible] same way. You know the crane driver, yes you know, "Len, get on here. I'm having a smoke." And it's an easy job, you know, nothing very, no nothing heavier, nothing, but you know, just swing over this way, let the boom down a little bit, you know, give him some slack. So I wasn't a crane driver, but I could drive a crane. So when I went to take a crane job, they said, "No, you don't have a rating."

So, and I'm color-blind, like reds and greens—one out of every 10 man, one out of every 10 is color-blind, red and green. So I went to this guy that tested airline pilots. And he gave me the test, and what it is a sheet of paper, and it's elevated. And you pick the ones that are up and not the ones that are flat. And I looked and I said, "That's it." And he says, "Are you sure?" And I look, "And oh, no," and I says, "That one." He says, "You can't work on the railroads, but you could fly jets." He gave me a piece of paper that said that I had good vision, and he said, "If they say no, you tell them I'll have them in court." So then I got my crane rating.

I've been working since [I was] 15 years old. You know, I don't have any education. I'm good at math. I can read and write. I misspell some words. But now with the computer, I hit the spell check. Not only that, my son bought me a speaking program for the computer. Well there you go, that's it.

[01:03:49] **HARVEY:** Well it's very much appreciated.